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NSC BRIEFING

3 March 1954

THE NEW SYRIAN SITUATION

I. A confused situation

A. Shishakli four-year dictatorship
replaced by temporary civilian
government currently supported by army.

B. Octogenarian, President Hashem al Atassi;
has been labeled senile, willing tool
of extremist rebels and pro-Iraqi;
coalition cabinet; army in background.

1. Prime Minister Asali, one of five
Nationalists, four Populists and
three Independents.

a. Nationalists are remains
independence movement against
French prior 1945.

b. Some Populists favor union with
Iraq.

2. Defense Minister Dawalibi,
opportunistic, leftist, anti-Western,
pan-Islamist support of Mufti,
Moslem Brotherhood.

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3. Foreign Affairs Minister Faydi Atassi, experienced pro-Western nephew of president.
4. Army leaders not unified; none dominant.

II. Anticipated developments

- A. Efforts restore 1951 constitutional situation will meet difficulties. Elections promised in two months.
 1. Politicians divided; none popular; poor party organization. Exiled leaders Quwatli and Mardam have Saudi financing and may return.
 2. Bitter quarrels over union with Iraq. Prime Minister reportedly received money from Iraq to overthrow Shishakli. Some Syrians, supported by Saudi Arabia and Egypt, oppose union.

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B. New opportunities for radical socialists, Communists and Moslem Brotherhood.

1. Parties' weakness may give leftist Akram Hawrani significant role.

Alleged Hawrani partisan is one of revolt leaders, Capt. Hamdun.

2. Brotherhood and Communists inspired some disturbances; latter tried seize radio Damascus.

C. Army will be strongly tempted re-enter scene; did so in three 1949 coups; followed by Shishakli fully taking over in 1951. Struggle for power now on in army.

III. Implications for US

Coalition government unable move forward on any issue significant to US.

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CONFIDENTIAL
SYRIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

I. National Front

Prominent in independence movement against French prior 1945; wanted republican Syria; in power when army took over in 1949.

A. Leaders: Shukri Quwatli, Jamil Mardam, Hashem al Atassi.

B. Members in cabinet: Asali (prime minister), Muhammad Sulayman al Ahmad, Fakhir Kayyali, Afif Sulh.

II. Populist Party

Formed in 1948 in opposition to Quwatli's hold on Nationalists. Largest and most important party, closest to Western type party. Promotes secular, representative democracy, Arab nationalism.

A. Cabinet members: Ma'ruf Dawlibi, Faydi al Atassi.

III. Arab Socialist Party

Extreme leftist and anti-Western group led by Akram Hawrani. Merged in December 1952 with extremist Arab Resurrection Party.

IV. Syrian Social National Party

Small well-organized group, with branch in Lebanon, aims at re-establishing enlarged Syria existent under Ottoman Empire -- Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, former Palestine and Iraq.

A. Shishakli formerly member.

V. Arab Liberation Movement

Organized by Shishakli in 1952. Can be assumed to be inoperative.

MSC - Item 3/4 - 10/1/50

- 1- DCI
- 2- US Nat'l Sec Programs Status
AEC, DCI - NSC 5407
- 3- US Obj in War w R - NSC 5410
- 4- US Pol towards Asia
- 5- Report by Dir FOA
- 6- Proposed Ref offer of trips to Laos
- 7- Assurances to Fr in re EDC
- 8- Law on order of succession & Presidency
- 9- Status of Projects